

Democrats to Keep Up Drive for Bipartisan Action on Iraq War

By Shailagh Murray and Jonathan Weisman

Democrats vowed yesterday to continue their uphill struggle to force [President Bush](#) to change course in [Iraq](#), allowing legislative action on the war to spill into next week as negotiations continue on measures they hope could attract bipartisan support.

[Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid \(Nev.\)](#) said Democrats will not yield to a mostly unified Republican caucus by cutting short the war debate, despite few indications that [GOP](#) senators are open to compromise. Underscoring his resolve, Reid revived a proposal to cut off funding for most [U.S. military](#) operations in Iraq by next summer -- the most drastic antiwar measure in the legislative mix, and the biggest long shot for passage.

Co-sponsored by Reid and [Sen. Russell Feingold](#) (D-Wis.), the legislation was rejected 70 to 28, with only a few votes changing since May 16, when similar language died on a 67 to 29 vote. The Senate is to revisit today legislation that would set a timetable for withdrawing troops, another effort doomed to failure.

Behind the scenes, negotiations are continuing in the House and Senate to reach a bipartisan accord that could be considered in the Senate next week, as debate continues on the annual defense policy bill, or later this month, when Congress will consider new Iraq funding legislation.

"We still have hope that we can come up with something that will get us a majority of the votes," Reid said.

Republicans said they detected little movement within their own ranks. "I think the votes are roughly the same as four to six weeks ago," said [Sen. Richard G. Lugar \(Ind.\)](#), the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee.

Traditionally, the Senate has been the venue for bipartisan compromise and the House has sharpened political divisions. But Democratic leadership aides said yesterday the House may try to take the lead this time.

In their first meetings with the leadership, [Reps. John Tanner](#) (D-Tenn.), [Mike Ross](#) (D-Ark.), [Michael N. Castle](#) (R-Del.) and Phil English (R-Pa.) sat down with House [Minority Leader John A. Boehner](#) (R-Ohio), House [Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer](#) (D-Md.) and House Armed Services Committee Chairman [Ike Skelton](#) (D-Mo.) to plead for a less confrontational debate when the House returns to war legislation.

Democrats also released a letter with 48 signatures from across the party's ideological spectrum demanding a vote on legislation that would give the administration 60 days to present Congress with a plan for withdrawing troops from Iraq. The legislation, drafted by Tanner, English and [Rep. Neil Abercrombie](#) (D-Hawaii), has been at the center of a fierce struggle among House Democrats. Antiwar activists say the measure would do nothing but give cover to Republicans looking for a way to tell constituents that they are standing against the war.

Twelve Republicans and eight Democrats in the House also signed on to what they call a "bipartisan compact" on Iraq. Although far from a definitive policy document, the compact indicates that moderates in both parties are coalescing against any cutoff of funds for the war, but are in favor of a mandated change of mission in Iraq away from combat. The document states that "efforts to eliminate funding for U.S. forces engaged in combat and in harm's way in Iraq would put at risk the safety and security of our service members."

But it asserts that "the Government of Iraq must now be responsible for Iraq's future course," and that "it is critical for members of the U.S. Armed Forces . . . to have adequate rest and recuperation periods between deployments."

"The continued military mission of U.S. combat forces must lead to a timely transition to conducting counterterrorism operations, protecting the U.S. Armed Forces, supporting and equipping Iraqi forces to take full responsibility for their own security, assisting refugees, and preventing genocide," the document concludes.

A shift in the momentum of the war debate took place in the Senate on Wednesday, when a bipartisan proposal to extend the time between combat tours for troops did not attract the needed 60 votes, after anticipated Republican votes failed to materialize. Reid described how he had spent three weeks phoning and visiting GOP senators, seeking their support for the home-leave bill.

"I even called [Larry Craig](#), trying to get some votes," said Reid, referring to the [Idaho](#) Republican who pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct charges related to an encounter with a police officer in an airport restroom. Craig confirmed that Reid called him last week.

"I got what I thought were some assurances," Reid said. "But the power of the [White House](#) was too much."

Democrats started to lose ground in the war debate last week. Bush announced then that he will adopt the recommendations of Army [Gen. David H. Petraeus](#), the top U.S. commander in Iraq, to begin withdrawing a small number of troops before the end of the year, although 130,000 U.S. troops will remain through next summer -- the same number in place before Bush sent additional forces earlier this year. The plan reassured many Republicans that Bush is moving in the direction of a troop-reduction plan, albeit on a much slower timetable than Democrats have sought.

Another blow came in the form of a full-page advertisement in the [New York Times](#) by the antiwar group [MoveOn.org](#), attacking Petraeus's patriotism. Democrats denounced the ad, but it caused some Republicans to shy away.

"I think the effectiveness of Petraeus and his testimony and the counterproductiveness of MoveOn.org froze everyone in their pre-August positions," said [Sen. Gordon Smith](#) (R-Ore.), who had been negotiating with Democrats on bipartisan withdrawal terms. Referring to Iraq, he said, "The facts on the ground there will determine the attitude of the American people, and the flexibility their elected representatives show."